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MIDLANDS

ZONE

SEPTEMBER 2019 ISSUE 269



GOD SAVE OUR QUEENS!

RuPaul's Drag Race UK line-up is revealed

GAYSIAN LOVE STORY
My Beautiful Laundrette returns to the stage



**GAY SCENE
IN PICTURES
+ WHAT'S ON**

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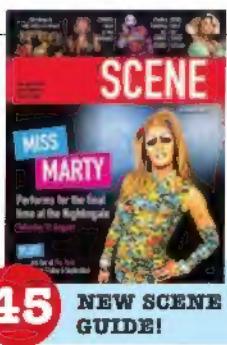
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NEW SCENE
GUIDE!

Priscilla's tour bus heads to the Midlands

The touring version of iconic musical *Priscilla Queen Of The Desert* is heading for the Midlands this autumn, with Strictly Come Dancing winner Joe McFadden taking top billing.

Based on the movie of the same name, *Priscilla* the stage show has wowed both West End and Broadway audiences, picking up numerous coveted awards along the way.

Priscilla's tour bus pulls in at Curve Theatre Leicester from 28 October to 2 November.

It then returns to the Midlands in early 2020, stopping off at Theatre Royal Nottingham from 27 January to 1 February and then visiting Birmingham Hippodrome from 13 to 18 April.

Everybody's Talking About Jamie on the big screen

The much-anticipated movie version of West End musical *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* is to be released by Twentieth Century Fox on 23 November 2020.

The film stars Max Harwood as Jamie - making his professional on-screen debut - Richard E Grant as Hugo and his drag alias Loco Chanel, Sarah Lancashire as Margaret New, Catastrophe's Sharon Horgan as Miss Hedge and Shobna Gulati as Ray, who also played the role in the West End production.

Birmingham MP joins Brummie comic to talk about LGBT lessons in schools

Birmingham Yardley MP Jess Phillips has once again spoken out about the LGBT lessons row which has been engulfing two of the city's schools.

Speaking to fellow Brummie, comedian Joe Lycett, at the Edinburgh TV Festival, Ms Phillips said that she felt politicians were afraid to confront religious communities: "People are really anxious about standing up against religious communities and feel that you have to triangulate and play the percentages. The reality is there is right and wrong in this situation. One is bigoted."

Ms Phillips voiced her opinion just before children returned to school for the autumn term.

One of the two Birmingham schools at the centre of the row over the teaching of LGBT lessons - Parkfield primary - has said it will be restarting its No Outsiders programme in the new academic year.

ASK FOR CLIVE

Brum venues launch anti-homophobia campaign



Arena Birmingham and Resorts World Arena have become the first venues in the second city to launch anti-homophobia campaign Ask For Clive.

The campaign encourages entertainment establishments to show solidarity in the fight against homophobia and

transphobia. Posters on display let customers know that if they see any discrimination or abuse of LGBTQ people, they can discreetly report it to staff by 'asking for Clive'. They will then be taken to a safe space while the incident is investigated and appropriate action taken.



Have ya heard?



ALL PRAISE THE RETURN OF CHURCH OF YSHEE

Organisers of Birmingham's critically acclaimed drag contest Church Of Yshee have announced that it will return in 2020.

This year's competition crowned Black Peppa its winner in a fiercely fought finale at the city's Nightingale Club on Sunday 11 August.

The contest, which has been described as one of the best inclusive drag events in the UK, was watched by a bumper audience that included Birmingham-born pansexual comedian Joe Lycett.

The much-heralded event was also a first for its creator, Yshee Black (aka James Bartholomew), as it was the first time his mum had ever seen him perform in drag.

Church Of Yshee returns to the Gay Village in March next year.

Strictly same-sex dancing - in Coventry!

Fancy yourself as Coventry's own Craig Revel Horwood or Shirley Ballas?...

Then why not join in the city's same-sex version of Strictly Come Dancing at The Yard on 11 & 12 October.

The only event of its kind outside London, Coventry Does Strictly promises a 'fun night filled with tango and samba while raising money for the Terrence Higgins Trust'. Tickets are £15 and include a 'welcome' drink and interval buffet.



Birmingham LGBT orchestra needs YOU!



An LGBT orchestra which came into being via an advert in Midlands Zone magazine is on the lookout for new members.

Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra (BGSO) promotes musical talent directly from within the LGBT community and is now in its 11th year.

With a new season under way this month, BGSO is keen to find a number of musicians.

Anyone and everyone is welcome to apply. The only stipulation is that you are over 16 years of age and can commit to the majority of rehearsals.

BGSO's next concert, Magical Musicals, takes place at St Paul's Church in the city's Jewellery Quarter on 30 November.



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WOLVERHAMPTON'S ONLY REMAINING GAY VENUE UNDER THREAT!



With Birmingham's Gay Village battling for its survival as property developers seek to build residential apartments in the area, it has emerged that Wolverhampton's only gay venue - which this month celebrates its 10th anniversary - is now facing a similar threat.

Gorgeous Nightclub is objecting to a planning application which would see a six-storey building comprising 113 dwellings and associated works being constructed opposite the venue.

Gorgeous' owner, Shaun Keasey, has opposed the application on the grounds of the 'negative impact' the development could have on the nightclub's business.

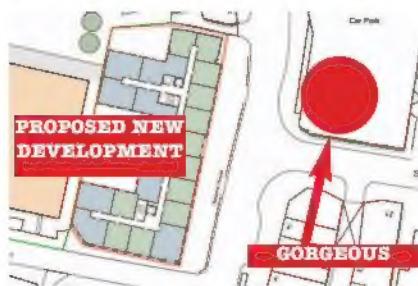
"Gorgeous operates until 6am on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and 8am on bank holidays and during Freshers' Week," said Mr Keasey. "It's licensed until 6am seven days a week and employs, directly or indirectly, over 30 local people."

"Not only is it this city's only LGBT venue, it's also celebrating its 10th an-

niversary this year and is very much the focus of Wolverhampton city centre's late-night economy."

SUPPORT GORGEOUS NIGHTCLUB BY OBJECTING TO THIS APPLICATION:

Simply log on to planningonline.wolverhampton.gov.uk and search for the planning application 19/00807/FUL



Artist impression of the proposed new development opposite Gorgeous nightclub



Decision on new GAY VILLAGE development gets deferred!



Artist impression of the proposed development on Lower Essex Street

A developer's application to build 116 apartments next to Birmingham Gay Village's Nightingale Club has been deferred.

Prosperity Developments was hoping to receive permission from the city council's planning committee to demolish existing buildings and develop a nine-to-12-storey apartment block at 16 Kent Street, the Amusement 13 site.

The committee were due to make their decision on 29 August, with members of the Midlands' LGBT community on standby to come together inside the Council House in support of the Nightingale.

However, with the committee expected to refuse the application, Prosperity Developments has asked for the decision to be deferred while it discusses with the Nightingale measures that they would consider in order to support the planning application.

Commenting on the situation, Councillor Gareth Moore said: "The applicant wants to try and overcome the reasons for refusal set out in the report and will be

meeting with officers for further discussions and the Nightingale Club."

If Prosperity Developments' application had gone before the committee this week and been given the green light, it could seriously have endangered the future of both the Nightingale and, given the venue's significance to the LGBT community, the Gay Village itself.

The council's planning committee visited the Gay Village on two separate occasions at the start of the year, once at nighttime and once in the day, to assess the area's viability for future development, and were made aware in a public



meeting attended by over 50 people of problems connected to building residential apartments in close proximity to the area's bars & clubs.

Commenting on the threat, Nightingale owner and Birmingham Pride Director Lawrence Barton said: "The proposed build next door to the Nightingale endangers the future of the whole Gay Village. The Gale has been the long-term anchor around which the city's gay scene has evolved and developed, and if the venue is suddenly undermined or, worse still, required to shut down because of complaints about noise levels from residents next door, then it's easy to see how the Gay Village could also face extinction.

"Birmingham's reputation as a diverse and progressive city will be destroyed, the nighttime economy seriously damaged and Birmingham Pride - which was this year voted the best Pride in the UK - profoundly diminished in status. Not only all that, but the LGBT community will no longer have a place where they can feel safe."



Members of the local planning committee inspecting Amusement 13

Gooch Estate to discuss our Gay Village concerns

Midlands Zone Editor Martin Monahan last month wrote an open letter to the directors of Benacre Properties Company - Lady Gooch and her two daughters, Lucinda Hutson and Victoria Vere Nicoll. Benacre runs the Gooch Estate, which owns most of the land that Birmingham's Gay Village venues occupy. To the right, we exclusively reveal their response, received via their agent from Pennycuick Collins, Charles Gillett.

The concerns raised in our letter will be discussed by Mr Gillett with the directors of the Gooch Estate in the coming weeks - and we look forward to reporting the outcome in a future issue.

Martin Monahan commented: "What we hope is that the company, which have investment property worth in excess of £65million, will support Birmingham's Gay Village through actions rather than just words - and renew Eden Bar's lease ahead of time to show their commitment to the LGBT community."

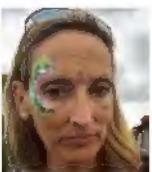
THE DIRECTORS OF THE GOOCH ESTATE WHO COULD HOLD THE KEY TO SAVING THE GAY VILLAGE



Lady Gooch



Lucinda Hutson



Victoria Vere Nicoll

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Dear Martin Monahan,

I refer to your letter dated 26 July 2019 (received 1 August), regarding the safeguarding of Birmingham's Gay Village and addressed to Lady Gooch, Lucinda Hutson and Victoria Vere Nicoll, directors of Benacre Properties Company, one of the owners that collectively are referred to as the 'Gooch Estate'. As I manage their interests in Birmingham they have asked that I respond on their behalf.

I note you have raised a number of issues of concern that I will discuss with the Gooch Estate but you will appreciate it is a difficult time of year being the middle of the holiday period and it may be some weeks before we are able to get together and consider this in more detail.

In the meantime if there are any businesses serving the community that are looking to locate within Southside or to relocate their businesses from existing premises in Southside then, whilst there are currently no premises available, if any interested parties contact us we will retain a note of their requirements and should any suitable accommodation become available we will endeavour to contact them.

Yours sincerely

Charles R Gillett FRICS
Director
Pennycuick Collins



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GOD SAVE

All handpicked for their huge slaying potential by Mama Ru herself, the identities of the 10 queens taking part in the first ever television series of RuPaul's Drag Race UK have been, er, ru-vealed!



OUR QUEENS!

To fall in love with them the same way I did.

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Get the low-down on all the queens >



Blu Hydrangea

Tell us about your act...

Blu Hydrangea is like a GCSE art project, high fashion from outer space, a cartoon character with muppet realness. She is queen of the makeup brush and her strength lies in her mug. Not only am I a look queen but I can dance, I can perform, I can do some funny movements to make people laugh.

Where did you get your drag name from?

It comes from a Blu Hydrangea bush,

that's in my garden. My nanna told me that we had to plant it with a rusty nail so that it turned into a beautiful blue hydrangea. I love the idea of something that comes from a rusty old nail turning into something beautiful, which is kind of like me as a person. I turned from being someone who wasn't so confident and a little bit of a nerd into this glamorous, colourful being. I love it!

What makes you unique?

Blu's greatest strengths are her makeup, which is always flawless, her lovely

outfits and her creative drive. I love to be outside the box; not just one of those queens who says they're outside the box. I actually *am* outside the box. One day I might be a beautiful lady, the next I might be a pineapple.

I try to think outside the box, I think that will give me an edge in the competition because I know that Michelle and Ru will be looking for someone who's polished, well put together and will look gorgeous wearing that crown - and that's me!

Baga Chipz

Tell us a bit about yourself...

Well, I'm Baga Chipz MBE, I'm 29 and I'm from London. Baga Chipz is a pub queen; a tart with a heart. Like someone's auntie, I give advice on how to pull fellas and how to get pissed. I'm not one of these gorgeous, beautiful, Kate Moss lookalike drag queens. My style is more of your 'cabaret, old school' sequin frocks, Shirley Bassey, Danny La Rue, 'Lily Savage' kind of drag. I'm common-as-muck Baga Chipz from Walthamstow.

Why did you want to do RuPaul's Drag Race UK?

I've always been a fan of drag, bollocks of drag TV shows. I wanted to show off my acts and personality and show RuPaul Baga Chipz.

When I auditioned it was like pulling a quid on the lottery. I thought, I haven't got a chance in hell. Once I got the phone call, I thought it was a prank call and then I started to get emails and I thought, 'Well done, love!'

How did you feel when you got the call?

It was like being on Coronation Street, and I don't miss Corrie for no one. I didn't know who it was who'd called, but I thought, 'They'll phone me back later.'

At the end of it was RuPaul's bloody Drag Race! I just couldn't believe it! In fact, I was so shocked at the second episode of the show because I was so over the moon.



Cheryl Hole

Tell us about yourself and your act...

I'm Cheryl Hole, I'm 25 years old, I'm from the glamorous land of Essex and I'm a dancing diva. I'm known for my dance moves, death drops and pure entertainment - which is exactly what you want from a drag queen, isn't it?

Can you tell us a bit more about your drag style?

My style is 'Essex glamour with a touch of showgirl'. Everything's got a bling and a touch of vajazzle, but I'm a real girl at

heart. I like to play up the Essex stereotype and really incorporate it into my drag.

How do you think viewers will describe you on Drag Race UK?

People watching at home will probably think, "Cheryl is that lovely girl everyone wants to be around and who's doing okay".

How did you get your drag name?

It comes from iconic Geordie princess Cheryl Cole. Cheryl has inspired so

much of my life. I'm also in a Girls Aloud drag tribute group called Gals Aloud. I play Cheryl for obvious reasons!

What do you think will be your greatest challenge on Drag Race UK?

I'm not known as a seamstress. I will put my best hand through that sewing machine, but don't be expecting couture gowns from me, darling!

Vinegar Strokes

Tell us a bit about yourself...

I'm Vinegar Strokes, I'm 35 and I'm from London. And yes, I'm a proper London lady, zone five. I'm a straight-up comedy queen - I do stand-up and sing in my own particular style. I'm like Tina Turner meets Lizzo meets Kat Slater.

What makes you unique?

I embrace who I am. I'm a working-class girl and I like to put that in my act to celebrate it and to wear my heart on my sleeve. It's really important to me.

Because we live in a segregated society, people want to be somebody different, so it's great to celebrate who you actually are.

How did you come up with your drag name?

It came about when I put on makeup for the first time and sent a picture to my best friend, who replied with: "Alright, Vinegar Tits", and I were like, "Vinegar? That's a hot name! I wasn't sure about tits' so I went on the internet, Vinegar Strokes popped up and I thought, that's

my name!

What's your career highlight to date?

It has to be performing in the West End in *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*. We've been able to work with Michelle Visage and Bianca Del Rio, and it's great to be able to take drag from a small idea to the West End and hopefully beyond.



Scaredy Kat

Tell us about your unique style...

I'd say my style of drag is probably very pink, very cute and very feline-esque. It's very camp, exciting, colourful and bold. Cute, pink and scared - like a nervous flamingo. I'm unique, and another thing that makes me unique is that I'm the youngest queen ever on Drag Race.

At the moment I do a lot of drag alone in my house. I've made quite a lot of videos - music videos, lip-sync videos, arty stuff and pictures, creative things.

but I need to be on a stage in front of millions of people because the attention just has to be on me right now.

How did you come up with your drag name?

It comes from the fact that I'm a bit of a pussy and am scared of everything, from answering the phone to going on Drag Race. It's all the same to me.

What's it like being a drag queen from a village?

I'm from Wiltshire, which is literally in the middle of nowhere. To ask if they have a drag scene is a joke in itself. There was one nearby, and even a gay bar - but it got shut down, obviously.

What do you do when you're not in drag?

I'm a student, so this is where my student loan is going. I'm wearing it right now.



Sum Ting Wong

Tell us about yourself

I'm Sum Ting Wong, I'm 30 and I live in Reading.

Tell us about your drag...

It comes from singing. I was a little emo kid at 12 years of age and I loved to sing. I can't be a singer out of drag. I'm a Chinese male who's overweight and losing his hair. I'm never gonna make it like that, so drag helped me finally live out my dream of performing and singing. That's the only reason I put all of this on

so that I can perform and sing. It's the best job in the world.

How did you come up with your drag name?

I used to be doing drag a few years ago, I wanted a name that was cheeky but also reflected my Chinese heritage. I browsed the internet and found some names that were in the news report which turned out to be a prank. It was about a missing Asian plane, and all the names of the missing crew were plays on Chinese names, such

as Sum Ting Wong, Wi Tu Lo and Ho Lee.

It's my own act of reclamation!

I'm here because I'm a drag queen, nothing else. I don't care what anyone says, it doesn't define who I am. I want to show you that I'm a queen like anyone else.



The Vivienne

Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I am The Vivienne, I'm 27 years old and I'm from the gorgeous town of Liverpool. I'm an engaged lady and I live for my fiance. And I'm here to win the crown of the first ever RuPaul's Drag Race UK, so bring it on!

How would you describe your style of drag?

My style is like a scouse wife who's come into money, moved to LA, blown it all and then had to move back to Liverpool.

I like to have a really fierce look but also be hilarious on stage, so I'm kind of old school and new school put together, which I think works.

Comedy is definitely my trump card. My favourite trick in drag is my vocal impersonations. I do everyone from Kim Woodburn to Gilla Black to Donald Trump; you name it, I'll do it - for the right price!

What does being in this competition mean to you?

Absolutely everything. I've got quite a big following outside of this, so if I fuck it up I'm gonna look so stupid. I owe it to myself and everyone who's been looking for me out there. Please God don't let me die!

Divina De Campo

Tell us a bit about yourself...

I'm Divina De Campo, I'm 35 and I'm from Brighouse in West Yorkshire. My act is a massive variety of different things. You'll get some opera, Italian aria, some pop tunes, some show tunes, some blue tunes. I like to sing things that are a bit more challenging or exciting; songs that make people say, "Oh my god, I wasn't expecting that". A bit of everything for everybody.

How would you describe your drag style?

Oh I am so glamour! A sequin dress, a big wig, a big bush, an approriate face.

When was the first time you did drag?

As a kid I was dressing up in drag at the time, but the first time I would do it was as Christina Aguilera from the Moulin Rouge video. I had this massive and ridiculous blonde wig and all these sequin clothes on. I was in love with my best friend and he didn't recognise me. I got

so hilarious fun, and I just kind of got the bug from there.

How do you think viewers will describe you?

I have absolutely no idea what anyone will think of me in terms of the competition because I hate competitions now. There's a secret for you! I find them really stressful and worry about whether I'll turn into the neurotic crazy person or whether I'll be okay.



Crystal

Tell us about yourself...

I'm Crystal, I'm 34, and although I'm originally from Canada, I've been living in London for the past 10 years. I have a British passport and dual citizenship through my mother, so I'm British.

Crystal is a gender-bending mess with your brain kinda queen. She stands for tearing down gender constructs using creativity, looks, fashion and crazy performances.

I do aerial circus, I can crack a whip, put

cigarettes out on my tongue - it's a freak show. It's unexpected. It's nothing you have ever seen before.

I'm unique as a drag performer because I'm not afraid to think outside the box and create looks, concepts, acts and performances that challenge, excite and are pulled from a lot of sources. I'm not a "cookie cutter" drag queen.

I do drag because of RuPaul's Drag Race, but I don't look to RuPaul's Drag Race to inspire my drag. I look to sources like '80s films, comic books and fantasy novels.

that's where I get my inspiration from.

Who are you when you're not in drag?

Crystal is the ultimate expression of Colin. Crystal is Colin without any of the baggage that comes with growing up queer in a straight world. She is totally liberated, very confident, and she doesn't have any of those hang-ups. It's really liberating.

Gothy Kendoll

Tell us about you and Gothy.

My name is Gothi Kendoll, I'm 21 and I'm from Leicester. My name comes from my friend, who described me as 'a kind of gothy one' because I used to wear black and have really black hair but I'm really tanned and wear loads of make-up.

How would you describe your dream?

"I'm contemporary, striking, and everything that's cool and fresh is going right now. The fact that my Goddy lets me bring in those girls

elements, especially when it comes to writing makeup.

I like to look very different to traditional queens, who are camper and more performance-based. I also do a lot of different work compared to other queens in the UK. I like to DJ, host and throw parties. That's what I'm good at.

I feel like a lot of queens in the UK are quite shut off to their own perception of drag, and that's what makes me stand out amongst them.

It's been a few days since we last spoke about the party. I think it's time to move on. I'm so tired of thinking about it. I throw the door open and step outside.

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Day: Thursdays

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Place: 30 Bedford Street South, LE1 3JR



Day: Fridays

Time: 12 - 2pm (last appointment 1.45pm)

Place: 2nd Floor, 27 Bowring Green Street, LE1 6AS

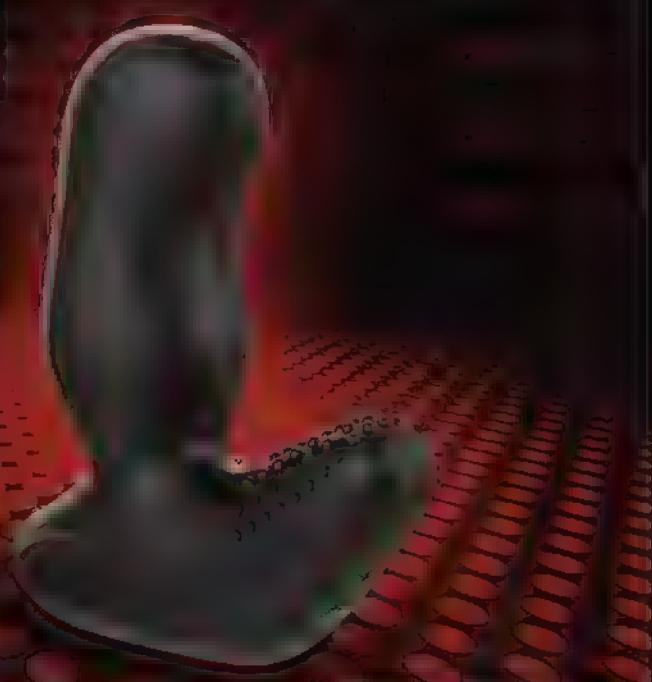
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So who's joining Mama Ru on the judging panel?



Alan Carr and **Graham Norton**

Alan Carr and Graham Norton will join RuPaul as judges on the new UK series of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The duo will be joined by a host of other famous faces, including British actors **Andrew Garfield** and **Michaela Coel**, and former Spice Girl **Geri Horner**.

Episodes will be Little Mix star **Jade Thirlwall** and Spice Girls icon **Geri Horner**. Also officially confirmed as guest judges are Game Of Thrones actress **Maisie Williams**, Girls Aloud's **Cheryl** and model **Twiggy**.



Celebrity judges

Confirmed guest judges include British actors **Andrew Garfield** and **Michaela Coel**. Episodes will be Little Mix star **Jade Thirlwall** and Spice Girls icon **Geri Horner**. Also officially confirmed as guest judges are Game Of Thrones actress **Maisie Williams**, Girls Aloud's **Cheryl** and model **Twiggy**.



Other famous faces set to appear...

Meanwhile, dance brothers **AJ** and **Curtis Pritchard** and singer **MC Yek** will join the show, applying their skills to the task of coaching the queens through some very testing challenges.

And **Lorraine Kelly** and **Stacey Dooley** will join RuPaul for the



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Coming up this month...

SUMMER OF PRIDE

Derby Pride

Saturday 7 September

Promising its biggest ever line-up, this year's festival celebrates 50 years of Pride and pays tribute to those who stood up to hatred, bigotry and brutality at New York's Stonewall Inn back in 1969.

Pride day starts with a large and colourful parade through the central shopping area and the Market Place, ending up at Curzon Street at midday for the start of the main event.

Hosting the main stage will be Soraya Vivian and Pete Martine, with other featured performers including Rozalla, Asifa Lahore, Kele le Roc, Typically Tina, United Vibe, Nikk Mager, Kitty Tray and Kitten T, Leo Golden Child and From Queen 2019, Xavier.

In addition to the on-stage performances, the event also includes a vibrant market area, food & drink vendors, two bars, fairground rides and a dedicated family zone featuring child friendly activities and attractions.

Full details are available at derbypride.co.uk



Pride In Gloucestershire

Saturday 14 September

Taking place in Gloucester Park, Pride In Gloucestershire is a not for-profit event run entirely by volunteers

As with all Pride gatherings in 2019, the event will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and feature an impressive line-up of LGBTQ+ artists and allies. At the time of going to print, participating performers include Allan Jay, Britain's Got Talent finalist Ronan Parke and local artist Misha Dawn.

Tin, Kelly Griggs, Clare Deloon, Eric Spike and Amrick Channa also feature in

the line-up

The festival includes a family zone, speakers' corner and exhibition space. New for 2019 is a multi-faith tent, inviting people of all faiths to relax and chat in a welcoming environment.

prideinglos.org.uk

Worcestershire Pride

Saturday 21 September

Now in its third year, Worcestershire Pride is the culmination of numerous LGBTQ events taking place across the city throughout the year.

The 2019 Pride Parade starts at the Elgar statue and winds its way through the city before arriving at the festival destination of the Cornmarket car park.

The Pride after-party takes place at Worcester LGBTQ venue The Flag from 6pm onwards and features a line-up of drag & cabaret artists that includes Betty Bangs, Miss Penny, Miss Marty, Fannie Coil, Misty Lee, The Gitoris Girls, Trisha Birmingham & Rockella Brown.

worcestershirepride.org

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE PRIDE



Thousands of people took part in this year's Pride celebrations, with the event's annual parade through the city streets terminating at the new-for-2019 'rainbow road'.

PHOTO
SPECIAL



Crowds filled the Pump Room Gardens in Leamington as Warwickshire Pride celebrated its 'Golden Pride' theme in the glorious sunshine!



Photos from Fox & Squirrel Photography

Photos from Cat Hamilton

Walsall Pride®



The sun shone bright on last month's bank holiday weekend Walsall Pride, with thousands of party-going people gathering in the town centre to soak up the atmosphere and enjoy the entertainment - including a performance by Sugababes favourite Mutya Buena...



Birmingham's **BLACK PEPPA**



The winner of Birmingham's Church Of Yshee contest, Black Peppa - aka Akeem Adams - hadn't even tried on drag this time last year! Zone chats to the fast-rising Beyoncé worshipper about what makes her tick, how she's intending to spend her prize money and who she'll be rooting for on RuPaul's Drag Race UK...



Name: Akeem Adams, aka Black Peppa

Age: 26

Born: Caribbean island St Maarten (Netherlands Antilles)

Live: Birmingham, United Kingdom

Star Sign: Virgo (like Beyoncé clearly!)

How did you come up with your stage name of Black Peppa?

For anyone who knows me, I literally cannot have food without there being some form of chilli or spice. And when thinking of the name with my fellow drag queens, Dixie Pop and Fleur Deschamps, it was a eureka moment when they said 'Black Pepper'. I wasn't too fond of it to begin with, as it had the word 'black' in there, which is cliche as I'm obviously black, but then it grew on me. I then thought that, as there weren't many queens of colour on the drag scene in Birmingham - apart from Yshee Black, of course - I'd rather stand proud and true to the coloured representation and keep 'black' in there. My best friend Luchiano is obsessed with Peppa Pig, and I later decided to change 'pepper' to 'peppa'. So now it's Black Peppa - and that's final!

How did it feel to be crowned winner of Church Of Yshee?

It's one of the most gratifying feelings I've ever had, aside from graduating from uni! But on a serious note, hard work and being very *extra* will never fail you! I'm not sure if it's really dawned on me yet that I've won - I'm still soaking in the reality of it - but every time someone congratulates me it's a reminder that I actually did the damn thing and turned it out! I'm beyond ecstatic, and proud of myself and my growth as a drag queen

considering I'm new to all this.

What was it about your act that won over the judges?

Good question! I'm not entirely sure, but a lot of thought was put into that performance. Months before I'd even made it through the semi finals, I remember thinking I needed to be a black Barbie and pop out of a giant Barbie box, completely ignoring the cost and the stress it would cause. I wanted my visuals to match the music mix perfectly. I wanted not just a freak show but my version - I thought through every costume, makeup looks, choreography, props and dancers. Needless to say I wanted a production! I started dance at a young age back home and attained an associates degree in general liberal arts, in which I studied drama and theatre - this made me very passionate about bringing an experience to the audience.

Who was your fiercest Church Of Yshee competitor?

If I were to be very honest, I wasn't thinking of anyone as my competition. I know this will sound a bit arrogant, but I really just wanted to give my best and not think too much about the competition because that would've driven my anxiety through the roof. If anything, I just wanted to show what I can bring - the actual stress came from hoping everything worked perfectly. I had so much respect for every competitor and wished them all the best and supported everyone. There were so many competitors this year, such as Dominus Von Vexo and Jenna Davinci, who I remember seeing the first time I came to Birmingham to watch this very competition. They are extremely

talented and are among the few I really admire and look up to

What are your plans for the £1,000 prize money you won?

From the start I had it in mind that if I won I'd send a majority of the money to my sister in France because she's going through a lot of financial difficulties. In addition, I'm in the process of moving to my new place, so the money comes into play perfectly for that.

Church Of Yshee has been described as one of the most inclusive drag events in the UK. In your opinion, what sets it apart from the rest?

As I'm very new to drag, I've only seen a few drag contests, and I must say that Church Of Yshee is an amazing competition for literally anyone - drag queen/drag king/trans/newbie. Anyone can apply, and that shows just how inclusive it is. All drag is valid!

How long did it take for you to prepare and rehearse your winning routine?

About a month. As I said previously, I'd envisioned the finale performance from the very start - so before I even knew if I was through the semi-finals, I'd already started practising with my dancers in the studio. It took a week to recruit the dancers - my past dancemates from Coventry University and others who I met in Birmingham. We practised two or three times a week for three weeks, and as you can imagine, each dancer had their own individual schedule and work commitments. The struggle and hassle to find time to practise was certainly real.

continued overleaf...



The many faces of Akeem Adams - Birmingham's Black Peppa

How long have you been performing as a drag artist?

I first got in drag for Halloween last year with Fleur Deschamps. I was Catwoman and she was Paris Hilton. I never intended to do drag, I just wanted to play dress-up. After almost winning the costume competition and going to a few drag shows, the thought crossed my mind but I was scared. Shortly after moving to Birmingham last year, I started gogo dancing and hosting at the Nightingale, and developed the confidence to push outside my comfort zone. After being persuaded by Yshee, I decided to give it a go at Fresh Face February at the Village Inn, where I made my debut performance as Catwoman.

What was your first gig?

After that performance at the Village Inn, I did Second Self. I re-did the performance, as the feedback had been so great. I was then asked by Jenna Davinci to perform in Mother's Meeting, which was jaw-dropping to me. Butterflies were in my stomach, but I thought to myself, 'Why not? It's all a learning experience', so decided to do it.

How would you describe your style?

I'd say my style screams sex and is unapologetic, liberating, S&M and features lots of pvc and latex! I get the sense I'm viewed as a dancing queen who's obsessed with Beyoncé, but I do so many more styles and can't wait to show what I have up my sleeve. Expect some

Caribbean flavour and more theatrical numbers!

What's your day job?

I work in a very well known bank by day and create by night.

What do you love most about living in the Midlands?

It's versatile, welcoming, multicultural and exciting. Moving from Coventry after graduating and coming directly to Birmingham, I can certainly say the Midlands is rapidly developing.

What's your pet hate about the Midlands scene?

Still kinda new here. Give me another year and I'll be able to answer that.

When did you realise you were gay?

I always knew. No denying it.

Who did you first come out to and when?

Members of my church slandered my name and did me the honour of telling everyone, including my parents, that I was gay and hung out with gay dancers in town. I remember feeling watched wherever I went. My parents asked me time after time, and I denied it because I was so scared of being kicked out of the house. I think they suspected but were ashamed and in denial. The year I left home and came to England, I officially told my mum before leaving. It was a very hard moment for us and was so depressing for me because I was so sick of the humiliation. I just wanted to leave and live in a new country.

What would you say to your 18-year-old self?

I would say that things will get difficult but genuine friends will stick around. Life will prove challenging but ride it like a wave. It's okay to fall as long as you get back up. You are strong, your skin is beautiful and you are loved.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I wish I'd accepted myself for who I am sooner. I'm nonetheless happy with my journey and wouldn't change a thing. Now it's my time.

What's your favourite way to spend your time away from the scene?

I love nature, hiking and travelling. I love coming up with concepts and designing outfits, not only for fashion shoots but also just for the sake of creating beautiful art.

Will you be watching Drag Race UK?

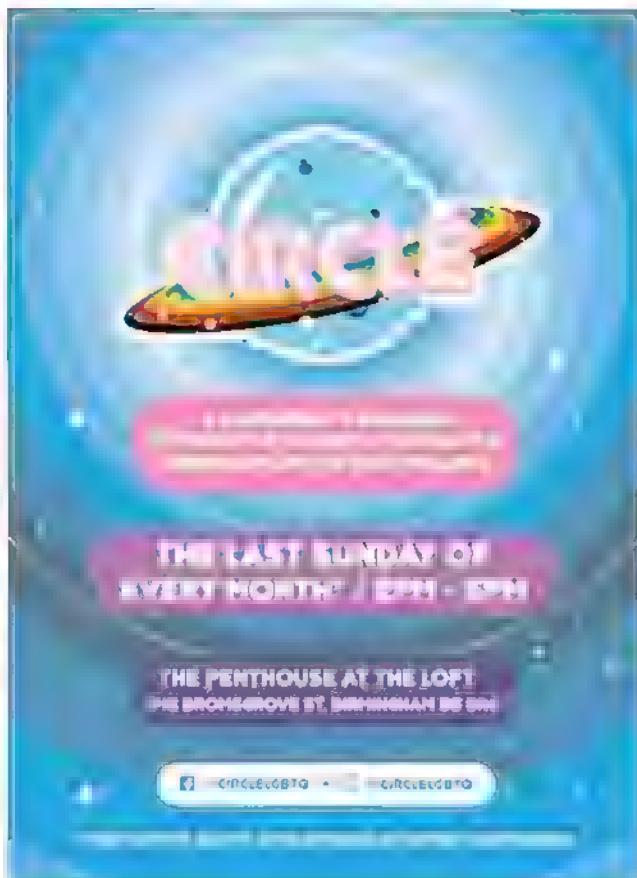
Most certainly yes, and it had better not disappoint - although I'm irked a bit by the lack of diversity in the cast.

Who will you be rooting for?

I'm rooting for all of them, but the ones who stand out for me are Blu Hydrangea, Gothi Kendall and The Vivienne

What's your long-term ambition?

My dream is to pursue fashion and spread my creative vision globally. Drag is a means of doing so, but is only one aspect of my ambition.



A poster for an evening with Armistead Maupin. The title 'AN EVENING WITH Armistead Maupin' is at the top in a large, stylized font. Below it, it says 'FANE PRODUCTIONS AND KILIMANJARO PRESENT THE LEGENDARY AUTHOR OF TALES OF THE CITY'. The date 'WED 2 OCTOBER' and location 'TOWN HALL BIRMINGHAM' are listed. A photo of Armistead Maupin is on the right. The Town Hall Birmingham logo is at the bottom right. The Fane Productions logo is at the bottom left. The website 'FANEPRODUCTIONS.COM/ARMISTEAD' and ticketing site 'MYTICKET.CO.UK' are also mentioned.

On the BUSES...

Buses send a shiver down my spine. Don't get me wrong, this is not some sort of transport snobbery. Without an underground train system, shoving a load of people into a tin box on wheels is really the only way forward - please note the subtle driving forwards joke there. Thank you.

And when it comes down to it, my entire love life was, for many years, totally dependent on Birmingham's night buses. I well remember wondering which bus stop to stand at - because there were definitely two of them - and then collapsing heavily to the floor because I chose to grab hold of the wrong one to steady my drunken legs. And *still* pulling because the bus was an hour late and there was nothing left to do but snog. Brilliant.

No, my horror of buses is for a much scarier reason. It started when I found myself following a bus, in heavy traffic, which had Pauline Quirk's face on the back of it. I couldn't get round the bus, I couldn't find any other vehicle to come between us; I couldn't think of a single short cut. I was stuck with Pauline Quirk smirking at me for 20 exceedingly long and torturous minutes. Was Birds Of A Feather not punishment enough for the wrongdoings of humankind? Why was her face on that bus? !??

Our mode of communication in recent decades has transformed massively. Social media means that communication is instantaneous. Rather than waiting for tomorrow's newspaper or the 10 o'clock news, we get news about stuff before the stuff has even finished happening. It's incredible the



"I KNOW WE ALL FELL FOR THAT BUSES 4 BREXIT THING... BUT A RAINBOW MAKING US GAY? I DON'T THINK SO"

developments in technology that have made this possible. Of course, the other way that communication has developed is not so technological - we have taken to painting things on buses.

So, there we have it. Pauline Quirk on a bus. More amusingly, there is an image doing the rounds of a photo of a woman

on the back of a bus with 'ride me all day for £3' written alongside her. Bargain. Even if it were Pauline Quirk, you'd have to admit that's good value.

But the main bus message I have in my mind is the one on the Brexit bus. That hideous bus. The bright red bus that said 'we give the EU £350million a week. Let's give it to the NHS instead' or some such utter nonsense. And people believed it. That message had a lot to do with how the vote swung away from logical thinking and towards the bedlam of Brexit.

It wasn't a normal tatty bus either - not one of those where you're not sure if the windows are etched or just filthy. Not one of those that smells of so many gross things you can't even start to list them. Not one of those buses with seats upholstered in second-hand chewing gum. No, it was a reassuringly flash bus. One of those that's probably the equivalent of a few nurses' salaries.

But BusMare continues. Apparently, Norwich has a Pride, Yay, Norwich! And someone had the bright idea of using the event as a means of brightening up buses with a rainbow, in support of all the lovely Norfolk gays. Genius. But then some grouchy driver refused to drive the bus because the rainbow adorned vehicle would be promoting homosexuality. Come on, I know the power of the bus slogan is great, I know we all fell for that Buses 4 Brexit thing... but a rainbow making us gay? I don't think so. Next you'll be telling me that Pauline Quirk on a bus had me watching ye olde episodes of Birds Of A Feather. It didn't. Honest. Well, maybe just one episode. I'm sorry, I'm weak. And the power of the bus is strong...



LET'S TALK: The Lacey Lou Column

F @laceymcf

Let's talk...

Queer secrets

As a community we have known plenty of hard times and suffered incredible levels of oppression. But being resilient creatures, we've always found ways around the complexities of life and forged ahead towards a brighter future.

And one method in particular by which the gay community negotiated the homophobia of past times has always fascinated me - the language of Polari.

With there no longer being so desperate a need to keep one's sexuality secret,

particularly in the western world, Polari is at real risk of being lost to future generations. A form of theatrical rhyming slang, the language was used by numerous groups in the 1900s, including the LGBTQ+ community and particularly gay men. Homosexuality at that time was illegal, and communicating in a way which allowed individuals to avoid being outed was essential.

The need for the language began to decline with the partial

decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967.

Many of the words used in Polari became part of our mainstream language, with some still being used to this day.

Do you recognise any of the Polari words below? Maybe we can bring the language back!

Lots of love,

Lacey X

Polari - Bona or Naff?

How many POLARI words below do you recognise?

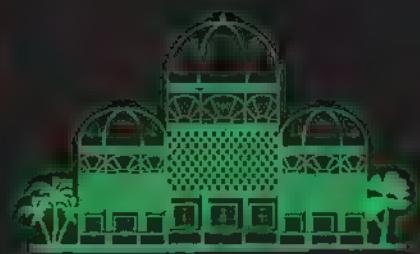
Bod: body
Bold: daring
Bona: good
Bevvy: drink
Butch: masculine
Camp: effeminate
Chicken: young boy
Cottage: public loo (particularly with reference to cottaging)
Cottaging: having or looking for sex in a toilet

Dish: an attractive male
Dizzy: scatter-brained
Dolly: pretty, nice, pleasant
Drag: clothes (particularly women's clothes)
Ecaf: face (backslang)
Fantabulosa: wonderful
Fruit: queen
Gelt: money
Glossies: magazines
Handbag: money

Hoofer: dancer
Khazi: toilet
Lilly: police (Lilly Law)
Luppers: fingers
Mince: walk (affectedly)
Naff: bad, drab (from Not Available For Fucking)
National handbag: dole
Nishta: nothing, no
Oglefakes: glasses

Ogles/Orbs: eyes
Onk: nose
Pots: teeth
Plate: feet
Scarper: to run off
Slap: makeup
Trade: sex
Troll: to walk about (especially looking for trade)
Vada/varda: see
Willets: breasts

TWITTER: Carry on the chat @laceymcfadyn



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Post-holiday BLUES

This month Steve shares top tips on how to avoid feeling down when you come back from vacation...

It's that time of year again, when those of us lucky enough to have been away on holiday this summer feel a bit down. The tan has faded, the promised emails to new found holiday friends haven't been sent and that bottle of hierbas, which tasted so good with ice in the bar in Ibiza, has now been pushed to the back of the kitchen cupboard...

Apparently 57% of Brits feel depressed or deflated after coming home from holiday. Even if you're happy with your relationship/job/health, many of us see holidays as an opportunity to reassess our lives. But invariably the sunshine, gin & tonics and welcome distractions end up with us having zero motivation to think about hardcore things, and the return home brings us back down to earth with a bump.

However, according to Carole Ann Rice, one of the UK's leading life coaches, the experience can be a positive thing and a wake-up call for change. She suggests that rather than just pushing on through and getting back to normal, there are a number of things we can do.

First of all, she suggests five things to make you feel better straight away...

- Unpack immediately and put luggage away. There's nothing worse than having cases hanging around reminding you of your trip.
- Recreate your favourite meal from



GET OFF FACEBOOK AND CONCENTRATE ON SEEING PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE

your holiday - rather than a bleak reminder, make it a new recipe in your repertoire

- Buy a new houseplant to replace any that died while you were away

ON THE
BALL
with
Steve Ball



- If possible, give yourself some time off work after your holiday. It might seem like a good idea to get the maximum time away, but getting back at 1am before work at 9am will only leave you feeling frazzled.

- De-clutter You survived out of a suitcase for two weeks, so fill a bag with stuff you don't need and take it to a charity shop.

Once the unpacking is done, Carole Ann suggests addressing some of the root causes of your post-holiday blues. First, make a list of things you don't want - perhaps the long commute, the extra pounds you're carrying or the untidy garden - and then make a list of the things you do want. What do you want for your health, career, social life, relationships and yourself? Plan things to look forward to straight away. Perhaps renew a lapsed gym membership or arrange coffee with a friend you haven't seen for a while.

Secondly, make a new-season resolution. Look back at your New Year resolutions and have a second go at them. Autumn is a great time for change, with the shorter days, the new term and lots of evening classes starting.

Thirdly, Carol Anne warns against comparing and despairing. If you're feeling sad after your holiday, going online to see pictures of mates sipping mojitos in Sitges will only make it worse. Instead, get off Facebook and concentrate on seeing people in real life

Gaysian play in the Midlands

Nikolai Foster's eagerly anticipated stage adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* makes its debut in the region this month...



Hanif Kureishi's original movie version of *My Beautiful Laundrette* was released in 1985 and focused on an interracial love story between a young Pakistani man and his old school friend, a white working-class guy who'd lost his way. A clever, funny and powerful reflection of life in Thatcher's Britain, the film has been named the 50th greatest British movie of the 20th century by the British Film Institute. With so much going for it, it's no wonder Leicester Curve's Artistic Director, Nikolai Foster, wanted to create a brand new stage version... Nikolai spoke to Zone ahead of the show's premiere at the venue late this month...

Why was *My Beautiful Laundrette* such a groundbreaking gay story, Nikolai?

It's an extraordinary piece of writing that follows two families: a Pakistani family and a makeshift white British working class one. The Pakistani family are very traditional, with the patriarch being an immigrant who's built up businesses across South London and whose wife conforms to the stereotype of a subservient housewife. They essentially have a loveless marriage. Their son, Omar, is cheeky, witty and subversive. He's a curious character who's really quiet when we meet him at the start of the play, but who gains his confidence when he's charged with looking after and transforming one of his uncle's laundrettes into a viable business. The second family is this white working class group who aren't a biological family. The head of their group is Johnny, who was played by Daniel Day Lewis in the original film.

Their relationship was quite unique...

Yes. Omar and Johnny were best mates at school. They didn't see race, colour, sexuality or politics - they were just really good friends regardless. As they got into their teenage years, Johnny started running with a load of skinheads, racists and BNP members. Not because, I think, he's a hateful person, but more through a lack of intelligence. He was sucked into a movement that his heart wasn't really in. The play begins when these two families collide and Johnny and Omar rekindle the relationship that started when they were boys.

My Beautiful Laundrette is really a story about these two men falling in love, and the clash, convergence and investigation of the two cultures they represent: the white working class English voice, frustrated at being left behind as the world changes around them, and the Pakistani immigrant community who are making Thatcher's Britain work for them by having successful, thriving businesses. Omar and Johnny bridge the gap between these two communities and have this really unique relationship.

What was going on in the 1980s that meant this film made such an impact?

Thatcher was busy drumming up her plans for Section 28, which was to make it illegal to 'promote sexuality in schools'. So they couldn't even talk about it. We were in the middle of the Aids crisis - a really terrifying time for the LGBTQ+ community. Hanif Kureishi's screenplay never once mentioned the words 'gay', 'queer' or 'homosexual'. He just told a love story that happened to be between two men, but the fact it's two men is never commented on by the writer. It's just accepted that love is a basic human right and that it's completely natural for two men to fall in love and have this incredible relationship.



This is a play about love, hope and young people moving the world forward



The film in itself was extraordinary for its time in terms of the LGBTQ+ community. It would've been the same with two white British boys, but the fact that it's between a Pakistani Muslim and a white working class ex BNP member made it even more poignant. It's a prayer for reconciliation, with Johnny's character learning and transforming

from doing and saying terrible, racist things into a character that we accept. He gives hope that everyone has the capacity for change and the ability to rectify their mistakes.

The interracial and inter-faith aspect of Omar and Johnny's relationship is particularly significant, than?

It doesn't take a lot of research to know that the middle of the '80s was a time of great sociopolitical turmoil, with the BNP marching up and down the country and hate crimes being commonplace. I think in many ways it was the interracial element of the central gay relationship that made this film so revolutionary. There's so much going on even now, in 2019, in relation to homosexuality and different faith communities.

In the case of this play, Omar comes from a Muslim family. I think a lot of this is about reconciling people's faith and religious beliefs with the basic human rights of other groups. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was so subtle in its message, but that's what really made it a battle-cry for everyone who was gay or from another minority or ethnic group that felt ostracised. It feels just as relevant today as when Hanif wrote it.

As a gay man yourself, how do you feel about the relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and the wider population in 2019?

I feel horrified by the recent increase in homophobic violence and the reaction to gay relationships being a part of school teaching. I wouldn't say I feel scared because I feel that theatre and the arts has an ever-increasing role in making sense of these things, and I get comfort from being at the heart of that. I feel the theatre is a safe space for response to the increase in hate crimes and these incidents at Birmingham schools. We can tell complex, nuanced stories that look at the debate from both sides, hopefully meeting somewhere in the middle.

You have a role to play within theatre, but what are your concerns?

What I find so distressing at the moment,

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whether it be to do with homophobia, nationalism or racism, is that people just seem so polarised. It's black or white - there's no grey. I think of how far we've come, and then it seems in the last couple of years we've gone backwards. It's confusing how quickly such positive progress has been undone. I would argue that the only way we could move forward as communities, societies and nations is to listen to one another and find common ground: the things that unite us rather than drive us apart. I think this is a play that does just that, as the most charismatic voice in there is one of love and acceptance, which is a really powerful idea to be exploring at the moment.

How does the stage production differ from the film?

I was really keen to make sure that the world the film created - the wonderful, visceral taste of the 1980s in pre-gentrified South London - was captured in this production. Hanif and I have been working on the script for about a year, and what he's done brilliantly is really flesh out the story. Where, in a film, you can really tell a lot from a single frame, in a play you need more words and a bit more time to meet and understand the characters and the complex family dynamics. The family relationships in particular are explored more deeply. Whereas I think the film really zones in on this love story between Omar and Johnny, in this production we also get to know a lot more about Omar's family - his cousin, his uncle and his parent's loveless marriage. Hanif's also really looked at Johnny's group, and how his mates, Moose and Genghis, represent the typical far-right nationalist, racist group, and how they feel about Johnny leaving their family to go and work in the South Asian community with a Pakistani man he's in a relationship with. It really has the essence of the film, but it's now also peppered with a lot more complex characterisation and studies of these differing groups. It's a fabulous production because it feels like Hanif's written a new play rather than it just being an adaptation.

Back to the beginning... How did you get on board with this project and why did you want to be a part of it?

Every year our team at Curve get together with the Coventry Belgrade to do a contemporary world premiere play that we commission. We aim for it to be something that might encourage folk who don't normally come to the theatre to do so, such as younger people, or people from the Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities who feel the theatre may

not represent them. My Beautiful Laundrette seemed like the perfect thing, but we also thought it couldn't possibly be available because the whole world must've thought to take this amazing film to the stage. So we got in touch with Hanif to tell him our ideas and he said he'd love us to do it. We're really blessed that we got the right sort of play for Hanif to agree, and we're so happy that he recognised the value of what we're doing at theatres like The Curve and the Belgrade.

What was your criteria when looking to cast the roles of Omar and Johnny?

We were looking for magic, which I know sounds like cliche nonsense, but we were just looking for two actors who had a spark and something special. We were looking for people who you would believe were teenagers and working class, actors who understand what it means to be working class and to represent Johnny and Omar's communities with real integrity and authenticity. We were looking for actors who were brave, who were passionate about the themes in the play and its love and acceptance. Doing this play now, in 2019, is a really bold and exciting move, and we needed a lead who understood the statement we were making. I'd worked with Johnny Fines before, and then the minute Omar Malik walked into the room and started reading, it just clicked instantly. We don't even question their relationship, we just believe them - they're simply magnetic."

Tell us about the Pet Shop Boys' involvement in composing the score for this particular production...

When Hanif and I were talking about the music we'd like to have in the play, I was referencing Jimmy Somerville, Blondie - all those incredible bands who were writing politically charged pop music. Pet Shop Boys featured heavily on that list. Hanif had a contact, so dropped Neil Tenant a line to ask if he'd be up for letting us use some of their songs. Neil got back to us very quickly, we pitched our idea to them and they really got it. I gave them some themes, like the laundrette and London in the 1980s, and then a song for the ending about tolerance and love having no boundaries. So they've written us a couple of pop songs to accompany the play, as well as giving us access to some of their iconic hits, which will underline some of the scenes. It was just so fortuitous that they

were up for it, and it's a real testament to Hanif's writing that they saw the value of what we were trying to achieve.

What do you hope audiences - both LGBTQ+ and otherwise - take away from the play?

Well, first and foremost they're parting with their hard earned cash, so we hope they're incredibly moved and entertained. But I also hope they'll be challenged. I hope they leave My Beautiful Laundrette thinking about their own lives and communities, or considering other people's experiences in a way they maybe hadn't done before. I think this is a play about love, hope and young people moving the world forward. It's a really powerful message, and I hope that vibrancy will be celebrated beyond coming to see the play. I hope audiences take the experience forward with them."

And finally, could you sum up My Beautiful Laundrette in three words?

Full bodied, life-affirming, wicked!

My Beautiful Laundrette shows at Curve, Leicester, from 20 September to 5 October; Belgrave Theatre, Coventry, from 29 October to 2 November & Birmingham Repertory Theatre from 5 to 9 November.



What's On

9 to 5 - THE MUSICAL



"I'm so excited that 9 to 5 is heading to the Midlands," says Dolly Parton in talking about her hit musical's visit to the second city. "I'm hoping you have as much fun watching it as I had writing the music for it. The show is perfect for anyone who's ever wanted to string up their boss, which is almost all of us. So come join the fun!" As with the original 1980s movie and spin off TV series, the stage production of 9 to 5 centres around the story of three office workers who turn the tables on their sexist and egotistical bigot of a boss. Love Island 2017 winner Amber Davies takes top billing

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Midland

Cabaret

Hit musical Cabaret is back in the Midlands this month, complete with show-stopping choreography, dazzling costumes and iconic songs Money Makes The World Go Round, Maybe This Time and, of course, the famous title track itself, Ex EastEnder John Partridge takes on the role of Emcee, with Kara Lily Hayworth playing Sally Bowles and veteran song'n'dance star Anita Harris appearing as Fräulein Schneider

**Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Tuesday 3 -
Saturday 7 September, Nottingham Theatre Royal,
Tuesday 10 - Saturday 14 September**





LGBT author & activist in Brum

Armistead Maupin

On his first ever UK tour, bestselling author and LGBT activist Armistead Maupin stops off in Birmingham for one night only

Maupin has been blazing a trail through US popular culture since the 1970s, when his iconic and ground-breaking series, Tales Of The City, was first published as a column in the San Francisco Chronicle. The series took the literary world by storm and has recently been adapted for streaming by Netflix.

Don't miss the chance to join America's ultimate storyteller as he recounts his favourite tales from the past four decades, along the way offering his own engaging observations on society and the world we inhabit.

Birmingham Town Hall, Wednesday 2 October

Same-sex marriage features in Stardust

This is British theatre's first ever South Asian theatrical production to feature same-sex marriage.

Presented by well established performing arts company Phizzical, Stardust follows British-Asian singer Amar's struggle to make his mark as a mainstream performer. While on his journey towards what he hopes will be real stardom, he discovers a long lost star of the 1980s' Bollywood music scene - and finds that events soon take a rather chilling turn...

Belgrave Theatre, Coventry,
Saturday 14 - Saturday 21 September



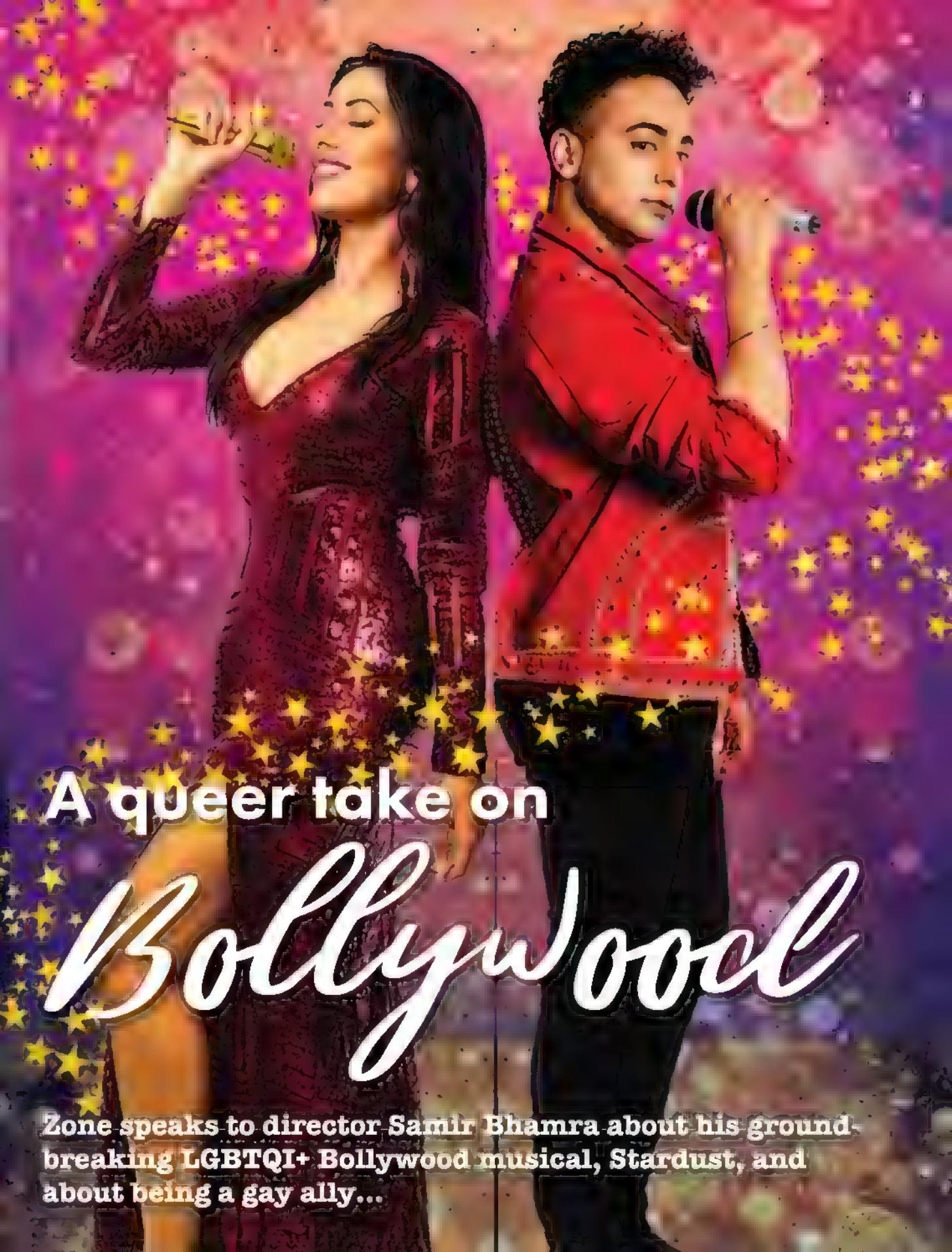
Bianca Del Rio in Brum



KuPaul's Drag Race champion Bianca Del Rio is bringing her side-splitting comedy to the Midlands this month as part of her biggest ever UK solo drag-show tour!

Irreverent, fierce and one of the biggest drag superstars in the world today, the self proclaimed 'clown in a gown' is guaranteed to have her adoring public in stitches with her comical tell it like it is views on life and the world, from politics and travel to family and social media.

We have two tickets to give away to see Bianca when she performs at Arena Birmingham on Thursday 5 September! Check out our website www.midlandszone.co.uk to enter!



A queer take on *Bollywood*

Zone speaks to director Samir Bhamra about his ground-breaking LGBTQI+ Bollywood musical, Stardust, and about being a gay ally...

South Asian performing arts company Phizzical is 15 years old in 2019 - and to celebrate, it's launching a 'thriller musical' entitled Stardust. The show is a first for the British stage, as it's the only South Asian theatre production to feature same sex marriage.

Stardust was sparked by the marriage of director Samir Bhamra's brother - and by listening to the music of singer-songwriter Robby Khela.

"About 20 years ago, I adopted a young man as a younger brother," explains Samir. "After gay marriage was legalised in the UK, he and his partner wanted to marry. Unfortunately his parents didn't know that he was gay. I played a small part in supporting him and his parents, and it was a magical wedding, a meeting of two cultures. Literally a few weeks later, singer-songwriter Robby Khela shared a song with me. It reminded me of every emotion that I'd witnessed during my brother's wedding, and I immediately felt that we needed to make a musical about acceptance and love."

The influence of Bollywood is hugely evident in Stardust - and was also a factor in Samir's arrival in the world. "My mother was a big Indian cinema fan. When she was pregnant with me, her waters broke at the cinema while she was watching a Bollywood film. She named me after the character who was the hero of the film!"

As well as writing the songs, Robby Khela also takes the lead role in the show, playing the character of Amar. But Samir and Robby weren't the only creatives involved in the project: "Stardust has been in the making for almost a decade. Robby has written and produced a wealth of songs independently since 2008. We officially began working on this in 2013, collaborating with an incredible writer. Unfortunately the world was not ready for that story, so we made it into a short musical film, which we released earlier this year. It's been winning several awards at film festivals globally."

"Then, two years ago, we decided to take a different approach. We'd just finished our previous show, Bring On The Bollywood, and every venue wanted something similar, so we set about changing the story and introduced a Bollywood angle with emerging writer Shahid Iqbal Khan. Set designer Rich

Evans came on board in 2017, which we felt was important because Stardust relies heavily on design."

Stardust follows British Asian singer Amar's struggle to make his mark as a mainstream performer. Amar discovers a long lost star of the 1980s' Bollywood music industry, a woman called Amor. His journey takes a chilling turn when he discovers that Amor was silenced for uncovering an explosive secret involving Cyrus, her music producer and husband...

"We want audiences to immerse themselves in a pop, R&B and Bollywood thriller. Stardust is set in the music industry and features a mix of love, reincarnation and revenge."

A musical thriller is an interesting angle to take on a Bollywood inspired production. Samir explains the choice: "When someone says the word Bollywood, you automatically assume kitsch dances, melodramatic scenes and colourful costumes. Unfortunately this is a terrible stereotype for a film industry that produces musical films in every genre. The kind of cinema and music produced changes with each decade. The films and songs reflect global politics. So we've pretty much set our minds to change the outdated perception of Bollywood in the UK."

Stardust also pays tribute to Bollywood's reincarnation genre...

"The reincarnation story has been told several times in some of the best Bollywood films. The first reincarnation thriller, *Mahal* (which translates as 'Palace'), was made by legendary director Kamal Amrohi in 1949. Then came possibly the best reincarnation romances - *Madhumati*, *Neel Kamal*, *Kudrat*, *Karz*, *Karan Arjun*, *Om Shanti Om* etc. Whilst we wanted to pay a tribute, our approach to the genre had to be very different, so we set about watching these films intensely to work out how we could be different. One of the things we found was that the films presented the notion that the soul has a gender. So the male characters are reborn as male and female characters as female. A lot of mystics and ancient South Asian poets contradict this notion and believe the spirit has no gender and is equal."

Samir has high hopes for Stardust when

it premieres this month: "Aside from being the director and co-writer, I originally commissioned this idea because I felt that we needed progressive stories on the British stage to reflect the Asian identity and the Bollywood experience. There have been some incredible plays reflecting Asian same-sex relationships, such as *Hijra* by Ash Kotak and *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Qureshi. However, we want to take our stories to the widest audiences in the deepest parts of the country - to inspire people, to move them and to thrill them until they leave hand in hand and happy."

So why the Belgrade for the premiere?

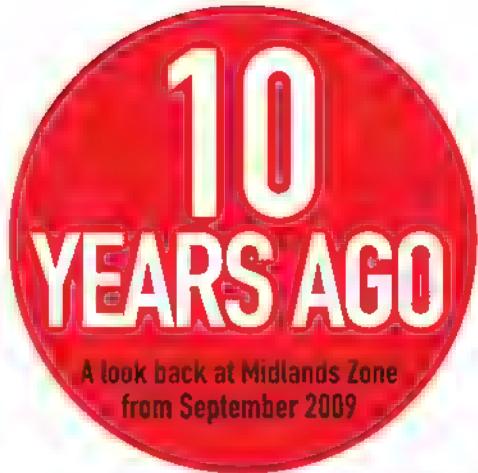
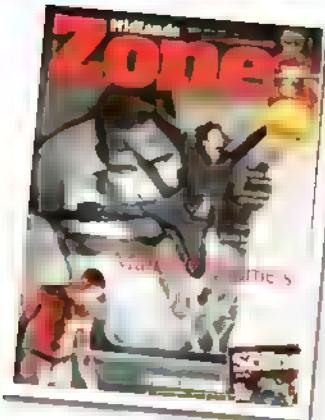
"The Belgrave and Coventry has been our second home since we brought a Bollywood version of William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* to the city and theatre in 2013. And after the incredible success of *Bring On The Bollywood* in 2016, we literally moved in. With the eyes of the world on Coventry as the City of Culture 2021, and with the Belgrave this autumn presenting a season of productions about love and belonging, I couldn't imagine opening the show anywhere else."

Stardust reflects some of the issues facing the British-Asian community right now

"Let's just look at what's happening in Birmingham, or search for the hidden stories of marriages of convenience, of gay men marrying women hoping for a cure, or worse, murdering them when the secret is discovered. And that's just skimming the surface."

Samir believes it's vitally important for South Asian theatre companies to represent the LGBTQ+ community: "It should be compulsory I have always worked with the widest and most diverse creatives and actors, and have directed work that touches on the LGBTQI+ community - be it Pulitzer Prize-nominated play *A Perfect Ganesh* by Terrence McNally, *The Maids* by Jean Genet or Omar Khan's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, titled *What You Fancy*. It's about representation and inclusion."

Stardust shows at the Belgrave Theatre, Coventry, from Saturday 14 to Saturday 21 September.



News LOCAL

Birmingham gay club announces major changes to its business structure

The Birmingham Club has announced a major restructuring of the business in response to the changing expression

Diversity awareness training in Brum

Nightingale committee announce changes to its structure and then goes bump the following year!

Photo: Steve & Associates

Gorgeous launch for new gay venue

Wolverhampton's brand new gay venue Gorgeous opened its doors at the end of July. It was given a preview night the night before the official opening and enjoyed a night of great entertainment, with many of the jubilous Marty

ing on Gorgeous's first few weeks of trading, owner says hard. The club's been very well received and is set to be really popular. The venue was shaken off in our Boys Night Out on 28th and 1st August. We're play our part in helping Wolverhampton on the map destination worth visiting.

It's 10 years since Gorgeous Nightclub in Wolverhampton opened its doors

GRROWL IN NEW BEARS NIGHT

Birmingham's slobes bears, hunks, chunk and cuties got growling last month when a brand new club night hit town. Growl, which was originally scheduled to take place every third Friday of the month, will now be happening every second Friday instead. The night is hosted by Wayne Shirrel and David Dindol, and is set to provide top commercial house and pop sounds.

Photo: Steve & Associates

David Dindol organised a new mens night called 'Growl' needless to say the launch night was a growling success!

A great time was had by all at the 2009 Stoke Pride event!

Big success for Telford Pride featuring Antony Cotton

Get along to
THE CIRCLE in Brum

SANDRA
back
in the
Midlands

Double
booking
for
DANNY
BEARD

DRAG
RACE
UK
STARS
in Brum



SCENE

Your guide to the
month ahead on
the GAY SCENE

SEPTEMBER 2011

MISS MARTY

Performs for the final
time at the Nightingale

Saturday 31 August

PLUS!

You catch her at The Yard,
Coventry on Friday 6 September



What's On

AROUND THE MIDLANDS GAY SCENE

SO LONG, FAREWELL TO MISS MARTY...

Birmingham drag legend Marty Smith is bidding farewell to the city's Nightingale Club after an incredible nine and a half years

The venue's longest serving hostess, Marty will be hanging up her heels at midnight for what will be her last ever full show at the end of August

But not to fret - she won't be gone forever! You can catch her getting up to her usual naughty antics at The Village Inn every Thursday and she's also performing at The Yard in Coventry in September. Phew!

Saturday 31 August
Nightingale Club, Birmingham

Friday 6 September,
The Yard, Coventry

Every Thursday,
The Village Inn, Birmingham

Danny Beard

Britain's Got Talent star Danny Beard returns to Birmingham's award-winning Eden Bar this month - and then returns again! Danny's certainly become one of the city's favourite drag acts in recent years; so if you still haven't caught up with him, make sure you head down to Eden this month.

Saturday 7 & Thursday 19 September, Eden, Birmingham

Vicky Jackson
Mon 2 September,
Havana Republic,
Shrewsbury

Drag Race UK stars in Birmingham



The wait is over and RuPaul's Drag Race UK is finally hitting our TV screens next month! But if you're a bit impatient and fancy getting a first look at a couple of the fabulous queens competing in the new series, you're in luck! The hilarious and talented Sum Ting Wong and Baga Chipz appear at Birmingham's Village Inn this month. We'll see you there!

Sum Ting Wong, Friday 13 September;
Baga Chipz, Friday 20 September,
Village Inn, Birmingham

Glee Night in Brum

Calling all Gleeks! After countless requests, the Nightingale is hosting a Glee-themed club night this month. Featuring all the best Glee covers, with fancy dress encouraged, the event is raising money for Circle Birmingham, a sober LGBTQ group that aims to promote physical & mental wellbeing.

Friday 20 September, Nightingale Club,
Birmingham



**Bonnie
La Blue**

Sat 7 September,
Bar Diva,
Dudley



**Martha
d'Arthur**

Mon 18 September,
Havana Republic,
Shrewsbury



**Vivienne
Lynsey**

Thurs 12 September,
Eden Bar,
Birmingham



SHANIA PAIN

Friday 6 September
Village Inn, Birmingham
Saturday 28 September
The Red Lion, Walsall



Sandra

The Whore of Hampstead Heath returns to the Midlands this month to get you in the party spirit. Be prepared for smutty jokes and a cracking sing-a-long.



ELECTRIC BLUE

Blue, blue, Electric Blue! Dudley's the place to head for if you fancy a memorable evening of camp frolics and dancefloor fillers!

Saturday 14 September,
Bar Diva, Dudley



**Miss
Penny**

Miss Penny performs her super-fantastic act in Coventry this month. Be sure to pop along - she's fab!

And you can also catch her as host and DJ in Shrewsbury at her weekly Monday night residency.

Friday 15 September
The Yard, Coventry

Every Monday,
Havana Republic,
Shrewsbury



Brenda LaBeau

Drag Idol UK 2016 finalist Brenda LaBeau is known for her incredible live vocals. The scouse songstress will surely bring the house down when she hits the stage at Eden Bar this month.

Thursday 26 September,
Eden Bar, Birmingham



What's On

Trisha Birmingham

This Birmingham-based queen heads back to The Yard this month. Expect the usual comedy, banter, fun and games!

Friday 27 September
The Yard, Coventry



Tina Sparkle

Get some glamour into your life when 'Welsh lovely' Tina Sparkle stops off in Dudley this month. Expect a hilarious night out!

Saturday 21 September
Bar Diva, Dudley



MARY MAC

Saturday 28 September
Eden Bar, Birmingham



Thunder Pussy
Fri 20 September
The Yard,
Coventry



GORGEOUS celebrates its 10th birthday!

Get ready to get down and dirty as the club celebrates its 10th anniversary. With plenty of giveaways throughout the night, we're expecting things to get down to be one hell of a party!

Saturday 28 September
Gorgeous, Wolverhampton



OTHER EVENTS INCLUDE:

Sun 1 September
Dare2Bare Boltz Club, B'ham

Sat 7 September
Official Derby Pride After Party The Crown Inn, Derby

Sun 8 September
Queer Life Drawing The Loft, Birmingham

Tue 10 September
Big Fat Gay Quiz Dover Castle, Leicester

Fri 13 September
T**k Social Media Eden Bar, Birmingham

Sat 14 September
Spangles The Red Lion, Walsall

Sun 15 September
Cineden, showing
Barbarella & Flash Gordon
Eden Bar, Birmingham
Leather Social Eden Bar, Birmingham

The Big Birmingham Doggo Social The Loft, Birmingham

Fri 20 September
Mids Bears Eden Bar, Birmingham
XXL The Core, Birmingham
Glee Night The Nightingale, Birmingham
Ghoul School's Grand Finale The Nightingale, Birmingham

Sat 21 September
The Steering Wheel Club Club Chic, Birmingham

Worcestershire Pride After Party The Flag, Worcester

Mon 23 September
Unicorn Disco - Part 2 Missing Bar, Birmingham

Sat 28 September
Club Scratches Eden Bar, Birmingham

Sun 29 September
Gameden Eden Bar, Birmingham



Karla Bear

Saturday 21 September
Eden Bar
Birmingham

A social CIRCLE



Circle, in Birmingham, is a new community enterprise promoting positive LGBTQ+ mental and physical health & wellbeing.

The group meets at The Penthouse, above The Loft, for a sober social on the final Sunday of every month.

The last two events have been very successful, welcoming between 50 and 60 people ranging in ages from eight to 60 - who've not only made use of the social space but also the board games, Lego and games consoles which are provided.

Circle is organised and attended by a qualified occupational therapist, who ensures that the participation

of all is facilitated.

The event has full step-free access and a quiet space for those with anxiety and sensory processing differences. Any possible adaptation required will be pursued to ensure that everyone has a positive experience.

Circle is inviting all members of the West Midlands LGBTQ+ community to attend its next event on Sunday 29 September.

You can find the group at 'circlelgbtq' on both Facebook and Instagram...

Sunday 29 September, The Penthouse (above The Loft), Birmingham

NEXT MONTH!

Tulisa in Brum!

Get set for all the bangers when Tulisa takes to the stage at Birmingham's Nightingale Club next month, including Young, Living Without You and N Dubz classics too! Na Na Na!

**Saturday 5 October,
Nightingale Club,
Birmingham**



BRAND NEW WEEKLY OFFER

ANY

2

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Karaoke & Disco with DJ
Nikki



EVERY SATURDAY
DJ Toni Lee & DJ Poor
alternate weeks.



THE LOFT

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B5 6RG
Tel: 0121 6222 444
theloftlounge.co.uk

The-Loft-Lounge

FIRST MONDAY OF
THE MONTH
Queeney's Quiz

EVERY MONDAY
Monday Cocktail Club
2 for £10

EVERY WEDNESDAY
Wing It Wednesday
Kilo of wings and drink £10

EVERY THURSDAY
Queeny's Quiz

EVERY FRIDAY
Karaoke & Disco with DJ
Nikki

EVERY SATURDAY
DJ Toni Lee & DJ Poor
alternate weeks.

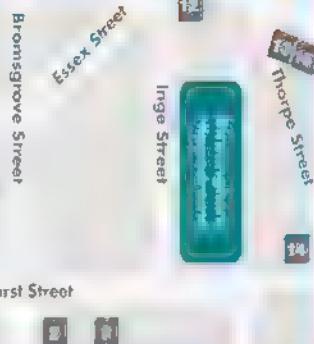
EVERY SUNDAY
Wing It Sunday
Kilo of wings and drink £10

The Nightingale, Birmingham

where you can pick up Midlands Zone

Birmingham Venues

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Clone Zone | 9 | Devil's Kitchen |
| 2 | Missing | 10 | The Loft |
| 3 | The Village | 11 | The Fountain |
| 4 | Eden Bar | 12 | Club Chic |
| 5 | The Core | 13 | Bar Jester |
| 6 | Boltz Club | 14 | Glamorous |
| 7 | The Fox | 15 | Birmingham |
| 8 | The
Nightingale | | LGBT |



EVERY TUESDAY
Karaoke with Gavina Vagina

EVERY THURSDAY 9PM
Thursdays with DJ Gavina
£1.50 bombs



EVERY FRIDAY 9PM
Hil Mui and Her with DJ
Mike Emery
& Gavina Vagina

EVERY SATURDAY
Missing's House Party with
DJ Matty, DJ Mike Emery and
host Twiggly



EVERY SUNDAY 8.30pm &
10.30pm
Camp as it Is with Amy
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Hilton



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guests

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Tel: 0121 666 6806

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Kent St, B5 6NB

FOUNTAIN INN
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THE FOX
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Tel: 0116 255 3052

HELSINKI
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Tel: 0116 254 7568

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SCENE



THE NIGHTINGALE BIRMINGHAM

August was another busy month for the Nightngale, especially with the much-anticipated final of Church of Yshee pulling in the punters.

Meanwhile next month sees Tulsa heading to the venue to perform solo tracks and N-Dubz classics on Saturday 5 October

(*Check the back cover for more details)







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the smartphone
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WITH DJ YOGI SpeedQuizzing



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DISCO
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WITH DJ NIKKI

SAT 7TH **DANNY BEARD**

THUR 12TH **VIVIENNE LYNSEY**

FRI 13TH **F**K SOCIAL MEDIA**

SAT 14TH **FANNY BURNS**

SUN 15TH CINEDEN 13PM
BARBARELLA AND FLASH GORDON

SUN 15TH **LEATHER SOCIAL**

THUR 19TH **DANNY BEARD**

FRI 20TH **MIDS BEARS**

SAT 21ST **KARLA BEAR**
DRAG IDOL 2019 WINNER!



THUR 26TH **BRENDA LABEAU**

SAT 28TH **CLUB SCRITCHES**
PUP SOCIAL ON SAT AFTERNOON

SAT 28TH **MARY MAC**

SUN 29TH **GAMEDEN**

SEPTEMBER



DJ TONI LEE

SAT 14TH
SAT 28TH



DJ PONI

SAT 7TH
SAT 21ST

Open from 2pm Mon-Fri 2pm Sat & Sun | 116 Sherlock St. Birmingham, B5 6NB | 0121 622 1953 | www.TheEdenBar.co.uk

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MANIAC



SHANIA PAIN

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WEDNESDAYS

KARAOKE
WITH
PORKPIE

THURSDAYS

THIRTY
THREE
CABARET
DAFFERS

SUNDAYS

YSHEE'S
BIG! BIG!
HAUS
PARTY
DRAG STAND-UP
PERFORMANCES

VILLAGE INN BIRMINGHAM



@VILLAGEBIRMINGHAM



@THEVILLAGEBRUM



@VILLAGEBRUM

THE YARD COVENTRY

One of Coventry's busiest and best LGBTQ+ venues. The Yard is packed week in and week out.

September sees the venue hosting Miss Marty, Miss Penny, Thunderpussy and Trisha Birmingham on Friday nights.
so what are you waiting for?

Head on down and have some fun!
(see advert opposite for more details)



September @ THE YARD

TUESDAY - QUIZ NIGHT
WEDNESDAY - OPEN MIC NIGHT
THURSDAY - FREE SHOT KARAOKE
SUNDAY - GAMES NIGHT



MISS MARTY
FRIDAY 6 SEPT



MISS PENNY
FRIDAY 13 SEPT



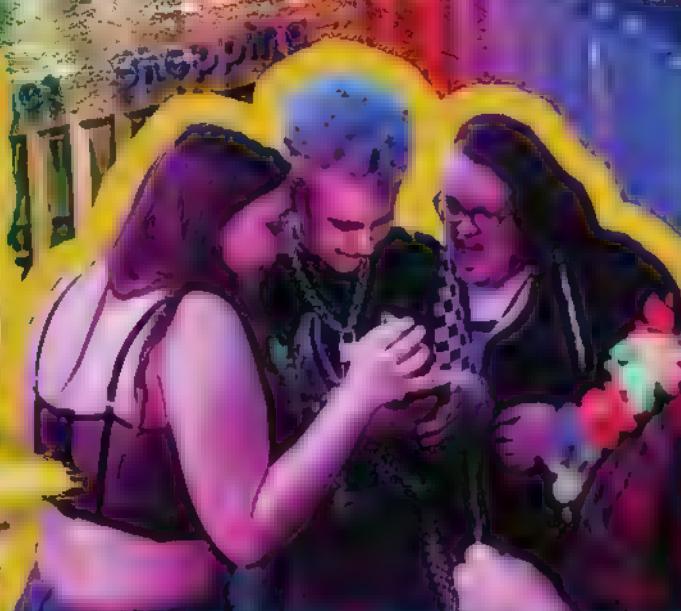
THUNDERPUSSY
FRIDAY 20 SEPT



TRISHA BIRMINGHAM
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@IDENTITY

new comedy - standups
22:00-23:30 - £10/RS



the
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BAR DIVA DUDLEY

If you're looking to let your hair down – and check out some first-class cabaret entertainment into the bargain – Dudley's Bar Diva is the place to head for!

Every Saturday night Bar Diva attracts some of the biggest names on the scene, and this month is no different, with Bonnie La Blue,

Electric Blue, Tina Sparkle and Sandra all heading to the popular Black Country venue.

(see advert opposite for more details)

BAR DIVA!

DUDLEY'S NIGHT CABARET VENUE

7
SEPT

BONNIE
LA BLUE

14
SEPT

ELECTRIC
BLUE

21
SEPT

TINA
SPARKLE

28
SEPT

SANDRA

THURSDAYS FRIDAYS SATURDAYS

SUNDAYS

MONDAYS

BAR DIVA

Lower Plaza Mall King Street DY2 8NZ Dudley

ZONE AWARD WINNER

/BarDivaThePlaceToBe

SCENE



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MARTHA
D'ARTHUR

MON 7 OCT
DONNA
TRUMP
(AS FEATURED ON
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Editor-in-Chief & Publisher: **Martin Monahan** Editorial: **Brian O'Faolain** brian@midlandszone.co.uk 01743 281701

Sales & Marketing: **Lei Woodhouse** lei@midlandszone.co.uk 01743 281703 **Chris Horton** chris.horton@midlandszone.co.uk 01743 281704

Managing Director: **Davina Evans** Subscriptions: **Adrian Parker** adrian.parker@midlandszone.co.uk 01743 281714

Graphic Designers: **Abi Whitehouse, Lisa Wassell, Chris Atherton** Accounts: **Julia Perry** julia@whatsonlive.co.uk 01743 281717

Contributors: **Steve Ball, Lacey Lou, Patsy Moss, Laura Byrne**

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